DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 062 705 EA 004 256

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TITLE Educational Auditing System.
INSTITUTION Delaware State Dept. of Public Instruction, Dover. Div. of Research, Planning, and Evaluation.
PUB DATE Dec 71
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Accountability; Educational Improvement; *Evaluation Methods; *Guidelines; *Program Evaluation; *State Departments of Education; State Supervisors

ABSTRACT

This position paper describes the philosophy, rationale, and activities of the Evaluation Section of the Delaware Department of Public Instruction for the purpose of establishing operational guidelines. Under a new system established in Delaware, the role of the evaluation supervisor at the State level has become one of independent, objective observer of locally operated educational projects or programs. The information obtained by the evaluators from the audit is then provided to the decisionmakers responsible for the project. (Author/JF)

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EDUCATIONAL AUDITING SYSTEM

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December 1971

PREFACE

This position paper represents a new approach toward the role performed by Supervisors of Evaluation in the Department of Public Instruction. The formulation of this new role is, in part, a response to the current demand for accountability in education. While consistent with the evolving USOE definition of an educational program auditor, the role of evaluation has been tailored to fit the educational context in Delaware.

The philosophy, rationale, and activities of the Evaluation section are sufficiently described herein to establish operational guidelines. Essentially, this system causes evaluators at the State level to be independent, objective observers of locally operated educational projects or programs. The State Evaluators or educational program auditors will provide the information obtained from the audit to the decision-makers who are responsible for the project. It is hoped that the result of the audit procedure will be better educational programs. This position paper was developed by Dr. Rita Hegedus.

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INTRODUCTION

Education in America is no longer accepted as an unquestioned good. The demand for better schools has caused an impact on several levels of the educational community. Local community-action groups have, perhaps, been most vocal in their attack on the schools, but they are not the only segment of society that is concerned. The increasing failures to pass school bond referenda and operating referenda as well as the crisis of cities forcing legislators to reappraise spending priorities have resulted in less money for schools. Delaware's Governor Russell W. Peterson, in a nationwide speech, expressed the sentiments of many in both the public and private sectors, when he said

> I am for commitment to Education, but not the blind faith of some professional educators who say just give us more dollars, let us alone and we'll get the job done. We have been doing pretty much that and the evidence is pretty conclusive--the job is not getting done for many of the children in our society. (5)

The problem for educators, then, is how to best address themselves to this growing lack of faith. One way to respond is to make the demand for accountability work for the schools. By definition, "accountability relates to the efficient and effective allocation of resources, including time, money, and personnel." (8) Thus, accountability at the state level can take a variety of forms from merit rating of employees to the establishment of a statewide testing program. The Delaware Educational Accountability System (DEAS)

which is being implemented by the Research Section of the Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division is, in fact, a major response of the Department of Public Instruction to the need for accountability in the schools. (7)

The Evaluation Section of the Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division has formulated a position for operation that is also directed toward accountability. With the July 1971 reorganization of the Department of Public Instruction, this Section was assigned the responsibility for evaluating all Title I and Title III programs, selected Career Programs, and selected State Programs. The purpose of this paper is to describe the basic philosophy and the activities by which the evaluation will be accomplished.

RATIONALE

In the past, the roles of the local project evaluator and the Department of Public Instruction evaluator of a federally-funded or state-funded project have overlapped causing a confusion of purposes. Given a broad enough definition of evaluation which allows evaluative activities to be of different types, it is proposed that the activities of each should be interlocking and supportive. In order to be applicable to both, evaluation is defined as the systematic procedure of collecting and analyzing information for distribution to those involved in the decision-making process. The information obtained should provide a basis for making rational judgments.

In terms of the individual project at the local level, evaluation has come to be recognized as an integral part of good management. The local project personnel have the responsibility for the evaluation design, instrumentation, data collection and analysis within the scope of the proposed program objectives. Thus, at this level the evaluation process is the medium through which management gathers data and analyzes the process and product for its own information and its own report system.

Given this, the responsibility for objectivity is assigned to the members of the Evaluation Staff at the state level whose role is interpreted to be that of an evaluator-auditor. The use of an audit procedure as a means for evaluating education has frequently been advocated by critics of our present educational system. Governor Peterson has again spoken for this group when he stated that "the evaluation or audit process" is necessary in order to obtain "an honest accounting of what has happened to children's attitudes, skills, and the level of knowledge in relation to locally-established objectives and goals." He further noted

> To be effective, the audit must be based on the objectives of the course or program as developed by the staff, students, or even the community. The objectives must be specific and the auditor must agree with the program people in the method of measuring whether the locally-developed objectives have been met. Judgments can be made on the basis of interviews, observations, or measurements on a small sample of students as well as the more usual standardized tests. Then, on a mutually-agreed-on schedule,

> the independent auditor evaluates the results and files a report at an open meeting giving both the accomplishments versus objectives and recommending ways the program may be made more effective. (5)

Dr. Leon Lessinger, former USOE Associate Commissioner, has also stated that one of the three basic assumptions of accountability is to have an outside independent review of demonstrated student accomplishment. (6) The USOE in pursuing this line of thought has developed procedures for the educational audit. The educational auditor is to contribute a perspective gained from his position external to the structure of the project management and from his experience with similar projects. The essential characteristics of the auditor's abilities are knowledge of program design, operation, evaluation, and management. The USOE believes, if properly implemented, "program auditing could well be one of the more significant contributions to educational administration in recent years." (2)

The educational program audit is basic to the proposed evaluation procedures of the Evaluation Section. The audit function at the state level will include a review of

1. Program management
2. Program operation (planning, needs, objectives, activities and evaluation)
3. Funding
4. Personnel
5. Facilities, materials, and equipment
6. Time schedule

It should be noted that, in order to maintain his objectivity, the educational auditor is not to be considered a general consultant and as such cannot become part of the local or state management team. Furthermore:

> Designing or modifying the evaluation system is not a function of the auditor. Should the auditor note discrepancies between the project objectives and the proposed instruments or procedures for evaluating them, he should communicate these discrepancies in his [audit report]. The selection of an appropriate alternative corrective action should always be a local management decision. (2)

While these activities help to define educational auditing, a system needs to be devised whereby the process becomes operational. The five phases of the audit system to be employed by the Evaluation Section are the pre-audit, site visit, audit report, dissemination of the audit report, and reply. These phases may be cycled through once, twice, or several times depending upon the nature of the project. Also, for selected programs more than one educational auditor may be involved. A descriptive outline of each of the five phases follows.

EDUCATIONAL AUDIT SYSTEM

Phase I-Pre-Audit

During the pre-audit stage, the educational auditor will read and become familiar with all the available information on a project (including the original proposal, LEA project reports, and Department of Public Instruction administrative reports). This, of course, presupposes

access to pertinent documents. At this time a critique of the approved proposal will be written and filed. Certain general guidelines will be observed in reviewing the project proposal. These are:

> a worthwhile proposal is one which...uses appropriate, adequate and efficient procedures in achieving objectives; shows promise of success via careful planning; makes provision for rigorous evaluation; and employs reasonable cost. (3)

This preliminary preparation will also include a list of questions raised during the reading of the available reports. These questions will be asked of the project director and other appropriate project personnel at the time of a site visit.

Phase II-Site Visits

In order to obtain a realistic appraisal of a project's activities, it is essential that they be viewed first hand. Thus, the second phase will include one or more site visits. Since the rationale of a site visit is to gather information, the activities of the educational auditor will be questioning, interviewing and observing. The purpose of the visitation will be to learn about those features of the project which cannot be learned through the reading of the project proposal and reports; to clear up any confusion which may have resulted from incomplete and/or inaccurate reports; to validate the accuracy of objective data included in the reports; and to provide a basis for making comparisons of subjective perceptions included in the reports. (4)

Specifically, the above activities will be accomplished by observing classroom situations using the experimental techniques (if any), interviewing pupils and teachers using new procedures, and gathering the reactions of the administrative personnel. Accurate description and assessment of an educational situation in its existing context cannot be accomplished by any other means.

During the site visit, all records including the following should be made available to the auditor: evaluation progress reports, collected data, anecdotal information and the budget. Without these records the audit report will only be as complete as the best available information, while access to them will enable the auditor to be factually correct. An exit interview with the project director and/or with the local chief school officer of schools, if it is at all possible to arrange for his presence, will be held to confirm the information obtained by the educational auditor and for the auditor to note the general direction of his intended report.

Phase III-The Audit Report

After the site visit has been concluded, the evaluation auditor will prepare a project audit report. This will, in essence, be a comparison of the proposed program management, operation, funding, personnel, facilities, materials, equipment, and time schedule with the actual status of them. The purpose of such a report is to provide feedback to the project director and other responsible program personnel. If

correctly implemented, the audit report should assist them in making more rational decisions in their continual efforts to improve the quality of the program. (9)

Generally, the audit report will contain descriptive statistics of the project, a summary status or overview, a comparison of the proposed and actual activities, and recommendations. The report as a whole will indicate, with supporting evidence, insofar as feasible, the extent to which the project is accomplishing what it was designed to accomplish. Thus, the auditor will assess the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of those key steps which having been carefully planned during the project development are being taken to meet the project objectives.

Phase IV-Dissemination

The educational audit report, after review by the State Program Coordinators for the program involved, will be sent to the local chief school officer and the local project director. In addition, copies of the audit are to be distributed immediately upon completion to members of the Administrative Council, DPI. A report of completed audits without the inclusion of the audit statement will be sent to the State Board of Education as a Section III agenda item.

Phase V-Reply

A reply to the audit report is to be made by the school district involved to the Director of the Division of Planning, Research, and Evaluation within three weeks of

receipt of the audit report. Upon receipt of this reply, it will be acknowledged by the Director of the Division or the person responsible for audits in general. If challenges are raised by local school personnel in this reply, then appropriate personnel in DPI will acknowledge those challenges and seek a resolution of the problems created.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate goal of all parties in this proposed system is the same--assured program success. A realistic, objective appraisal of the educational processes is being demanded now by a concerned citizenry. The position taken in this paper is that the Evaluation Section of the Planning, Research, and Evaluation Division can best accomplish its role through the educational audit. This should result in an accurate account of both the strengths and weaknesses of existing educational programs with an objective toward recommendations for improvement. The final responsibility for decision-making changes, however, rests in the local school district.

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